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Predicting Language Learners' Grades in the L1, L2, L3 and L4: The Effect of Some Psychological and Sociocognitive Variables

Jean-Marc Dewaele
Department of Applied Linguistics, Birkbeck, University of London, London, UK

This study of 89 Flemish high-school students' grades for L1 (Dutch), L2 (French), L3 (English) and L4 (German) investigates the effects of three higher-level personality dimensions (psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism), one lower-level personality dimension (foreign language anxiety) and sociobiographical variables (gender, social class) on the participants' language grades. Analyses of variance revealed no significant effects of the higher-level personality dimensions on grades. Participants with high levels of foreign language anxiety obtained significantly lower grades in the L2 and L3. Gender and social class had no effect. Strong positive correlations between grades in the different languages could point to an underlying socio-cognitive dimension. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

Gardner and MacIntyre (1992: 212) noted that 'there are probably as many factors that might account for individual differences in achievement in a second language as there are individuals . . . '. This statement could induce the naive reader into believing that Gardner and MacIntyre are postmodernists. The second part of the sentence does put things straight: 'however, they may be grouped into one of the two classifications of cognitive or affective variables' (p. 212). The uniqueness of the individual language learner is one of the central tenets of postmodern enquiry into second language learning. Post-modern researchers typically present detailed case studies of learners within a local and sociohistorical context (see for example Kinginger, 2004; to appear). They are wary of cognitive variables and avoid categorisations and general-isations. Social psychologists like Gardner and MacIntyre, on the other hand, thrive on categorisations of large groups of learners sharing specific char-acteristics that are identified as possible causes for success in second language learning.

The present study is firmly situated within the latter research area, but it does acknowledge the warnings of postmodernists. It deals with interindivi-dual variation linked to sociobiographical and psychological variables in final

year language grades for the L1, L2, L3 and L4 of 89 Flemish high-school students. More specifically, it focuses on the effect of higher-level personality dimensions (extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism), and – for the L2 and L3 – the effect of a lower-order personality dimension, foreign language anxiety (FLA). It also considers the relationship between grades in the different languages, which could point to an underlying dimension of language aptitude.

No study has, to my knowledge, ever considered the effect of multiple psychological and sociobiographical variables on students' language grades in the L1 and up to three foreign languages. Research has often focused on the separate effects of one or various independent variables on a single dependent variable in one foreign language (for example Aida, 1994). The danger of research designs that focus on a single foreign language lies in the fact that the findings tend to be interpreted as relating to *all* foreign language learning. In other words, the patterns observed for the *one* foreign language under investigation are deemed to be characteristic of any other learning of foreign languages. In the wake of the growing interest in trilingualism (cf. Jessner *et al*., 2001; Safont-Jordà, 2005), researchers have found that the same independent variables may have different effects on the L2 and the L3. Gardner and Tremblay (1998) and Lasagabaster (2000, 2005) have shown that motivation to learn a foreign language can vary from language to language within the same group of learners. Dewaele (2002a, 2005a) also found that the relationship between sociopsychological variables and dependent variables (FLA and attitudes) differed considerably in two foreign languages. Van Daele *et al*. (2006) found similar patterns for the effect of extraversion on proficiency, complexity and lexical complexity in French and English as foreign languages.

Microscopic approaches to individual differences, i.e. research designs with an exclusive focus on a single independent variable, risk presenting a distorted picture of a complex reality. I have argued that 'the individual learner, like the bilingual, is more than the sum of parts. Just as the movement of legs is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of walking, no single sociobiographical or psychological characteristic of the learner can account for the speed and ''success'' of the language learning process and of the actual speech production' (Dewaele, 2005b: 371). Microscopic research designs may uncover interesting patterns but they have an inherent flaw – they cannot capture complex interactions between independent variables: for example, some psychological or social variables have non-significant effects on L2 production in some situations, but their effect becomes significant in other situations. The degree of extraversion has no effect on written L2 production, but it is positively linked to oral L2 production in stressful situations (cf. Dewaele, 2002b; Dewaele & Furnham, 2000). Researchers need to be aware that the relations between dependent and independent variables may be influenced by other independent variables lurking in the background, invisible to the unsuspecting researcher. The present study will be relatively macroscopic, with a focus on the effect of a number of psychological and sociobiographical independent variables on language grades.

A watertight separation of social and psychological factors is untenable in second language acquisition (SLA). Social psychologists often consider both

types of factors within the same study but in separate sections. The societal context is taken into account (i.e. the intergroup climate in which interlocutors evolve) as well as the individual context (i.e. the personality characteristics found to be particularly relevant to communication) (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998: 555). It can sometimes be tricky to assign variables to either category as language-affect is often at the crossroads between social and psychological variables. The psychological variables often have a social component as well. Furnham and Heaven (1998: 32) point out that the causes of personality traits 'have always been acknowledged to be both biological and social'. Self-esteem is a good example of a potentially important factor in SLA (Dourado & Sperb, 2002). Self-esteem can be linked to increased learning, strengthening the self-esteem, at least as long educators manage to build and maintain their students' high self-esteem (Dourado & Sperb, 2002). Given the vast literature linked to the various independent and dependent variables, only a selection of the most relevant research linking independent and dependent variables will be presented (for a recent comprehensive overview of the field, see Dörnyei, 2005).

The Societal and Individual Context in the Present Study

The focus in the present study will be on the individual context rather than on the societal context (cf. MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). The latter refers to the intergroup climate, which is particularly tense between Dutch speaking Flemings and francophones. The population under investigation formed a relatively homogeneous group of Flemings proud of their linguistic heritage and unlikely to see the learning of foreign languages as an acculturation to the target language (TL) group (Dewaele, 2002a, 2005a). They were more likely to consider the learning of multiple foreign languages as the opening of many different windows to the world and the opportunity to communicate with members of different cultures. One of their foreign languages, French, is in fact spoken by francophone Belgians, who share the same culture as the Flemish participants (cf. Ameel *et al.*, 2005). The participants were found to be equally positive towards English speaking culture but much less so towards francophone culture (Dewaele, 2005a; Mettewie & Janssens, 2006). French – which used to enjoy an L2 status in Flanders – has become a foreign language for most Flemings (Willems, 1997).

No single personality trait has ever been found to predict overall success in second language learning. It remains to be seen whether the lack of clarity concerning the role of psychological variables in applied linguistic research is linked to methodological choices or whether language learning success is just independent of one's personality. It is possible that personality traits have indirect effects in language learning. Indeed, global personality dimensions determine to varying degrees the so-called 'language-related affect', namely FLA, attitudes and motivational propensities (Lalonde & Gardner, 1984; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). The effect of language attitudes and language learning motivation on foreign language learning has been studied extensively (cf. Dörnyei, 2005; Lasagabaster, 2006; Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2006). Many such studies have also been carried out in the Flemish context (Dewaele, 2005a;

Housen *et al*., 2004; Lochtman & Lutjeharms, 2004; Mettewie & Janssens, 2006; van Daele, 2007). The present study is also situated within the Flemish context but it will not include attitudinal and motivational variables. Instead it will focus exclusively on the effects of higher- and a lower-level personality dimensions and finally the social class and gender of the participant. These variables will be presented in the next section.

Extraversion–introversion

This dimension, described by Eysenck (1967), has received widespread acceptance in the psychological community (Furnham & Heaven, 1998). It has been described as a supertrait, and it figures prominently in both Eysenck's Giant Three model and the so-called Big Five Factor model. Eysenck suggested that variation on this dimension is physiological: introverts have higher baseline levels of cortical arousal as well as more reactivity to individual stimuli than extraverts. As a consequence, extraverts tend towards more arousing tasks that involve greater sensory stimulation in order to obtain an optimal level. In their NEO-PI-R model, Costa and McCrae (1992) divide extraversion into six facets: warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking and positive emotions. Eysenck and Eysenck (1975: 9) describe extraversion thus:

> The typical extravert is sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to .... The typical introvert is a quiet, retiring sort of person, introspective, fond of books rather than people; he is reserved and distant except to intimate friends.

Chamorro-Premuzic *et al*., (2006) investigated the link between personality dimensions and verbal and numerical ability among 118 adult job applicants in New Zealand.[1] The authors found that extraverted participants scored significantly higher on measures of verbal ability (p. 148). The authors acknowledge the fact that their correlational design does not allow them to identify causes and that scores on the ability tests may confound both intelligence as actual ability and intelligence as performance (p. 150). They conclude that introversion seems to have detrimental effects on ability test performance.

Applied linguists and educationalists have focused their attention on the possible effect of extraversion on success in L2 learning, the expectation being that the more talkative extraverted learners would have a natural advantage in the acquisition of the foreign language compared to their more introverted peers. However, studies where extraversion scores were correlated with language test scores revealed inconsistent results. Extraversion does not appear to be linked to accuracy rates in foreign language production (Dewaele, 1994). Dewaele and Furnham (1999: 523) pointed out that the results 'varied in how the personality trait was measured (i.e. self-report vs others' ratings), the language that was being learnt, the nationality of the learners but most importantly which language variables were measured and how'.

In the first study to investigate the role of extraversion on SLA, Smart *et al*. (1970) reported that in a group of 84 female American subjects, the 13 with

the best grades for intermediate French at high school and the highest academic aptitude scores were significantly more introverted: 'They do not enjoy social activities, prefer not to be in crowds, do not spend their free time at social functions, seldom take the initiative at social gatherings, work better by themselves, and prefer to work alone' (Smart *et al*., 1970: 419). By contrast, Chastain (1975) obtained completely opposite results. He analysed the relationship between final grades of 229 American university students learning French, Spanish and German in beginners' courses and personality variables including anxiety, reserved versus outgoing personality (i.e. extraversion) and creativity. The results for the reserved versus outgoing scale were inconsistent across languages: a positive relationship emerged for the 77 learners of Spanish and the 72 learners of German. However, no relationship was shown between extraversion and the final grades of 80 learners of French (Chastain, 1975: 156). SAT verbal ability scores did not correlate significantly with any personality variable. Chastain speculated that course grades may not be the best measure of language achievement as the assessment criteria may have varied in the different language classes. Swain and Burnaby (1976) correlated sociability and talkativeness (based on teacher ratings) on test results of French comprehension or production in a sample of 63 French immersion pupils and 68 pupils in the English programme with French as a L2 at kindergarten. No significant correlations were found. Naiman *et al*. (1978) hypothesised that extraversion might be a characteristic of the 'good language learner'. They collected written data through a Listening Test of French Achievement and an Imitation Test from 72 Canadian high school students learning French as an L2. Contrary to their expectations, they failed to find a correlation between extraversion and test scores in the L2 and this led them to question the construct validity of the introversion/extraversion dimension (Naiman *et al*., 1978: 67). This particular observation has been repeated in subsequent applied linguistic research and has badly affected the reputation of the extraversion variable (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999). Despite this setback, some researchers have continued to include the extraversion variable in their research designs. Busch (1982) investigated the issue with 39 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). A number of standard tests of English (written vocabulary and grammar tests, cloze tests, dictation and oral comprehension tests) were administered to measure English proficiency. None of the test results correlated positively with extraversion scores. Carell *et al*. (1996) analysed the relationships between the personality types of a group of 76 EFL students in Indonesia and various measures of academic performance. Extraversion scores did not correlate with test scores for reading comprehension, grammar and writing but a weak negative correlation emerged for vocabulary test performance. Clearer effects emerged in Kiani (1997), who focused on the relationship between extraversion and scores on standard English proficiency tests (TOEFL, IELTS) among 237 adult Iranian students undertaking postgraduate studies in English speaking universities. He discovered negative correlations between extraversion and test scores. The negative correlation was most significant between extraversion and the TOEFL subcomponent of reading comprehension and vocabulary. Marin-Marin (2005) considered the effect of extraversion on vocabulary learning strategies among

150 EFL university learners in Mexico. While very few significant relationships emerged between extraversion and vocabulary learning strategies or vocabulary test results, the researcher did find that a small subgroup of 12 introverts obtained significantly higher end of semester English grades than a group of 13 extraverts (Marin-Marin, 2005: 273). MacIntyre *et al.* (2007: 296) have also looked at the effect of extraversion on L2 vocabulary learning, and found that more introvert Canadian French L2 learners were found to perform best after having studied in a very familiar situation, while the extraverts performed better in conditions involving a moderate degree of novelty.

Finally, Van Daele *et al.*'s (2006) longitudinal study looked at the effect of extraversion on the fluency, complexity and accuracy of learners' oral L2 production (both English and French) over three six-month intervals. Participants were 25 Dutch speaking secondary school students learning both foreign languages in Flanders. Extraversion scores were found to be positively correlated with lexical complexity in both foreign languages but not with accuracy or with syntactic complexity at the first data collection point. The effect of extraversion faded over the following year. The authors suggest that this may be a methodological artefact, namely that the extraverts grew bored with the task over time and made less of an effort (Van Daele *et al.*, 2006: 227).

Neuroticism–emotional stability

Neuroticism (N) is the second major personality domain in Eysenck's (1967) model of personality. Costa and McCrae (1992) distinguish six facets in neuroticism: anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability. Costa and McCrae (1984) showed that all the facets are related to individuals' psychological state of mind, resulting in negative affect and lower life satisfaction. For Eysenck and Eysenck (1975: 9–10), the high Neuroticism scorer is: 'an anxious, worrying individual, moody and frequently depressed ... The stable individual, on the other hand, is usually calm, even-tempered, controlled and unworried'.

Chamorro-Premuzic *et al.*, (2006: 148) reported that emotionally stable individuals scored significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) on verbal ability than their more neurotic counterparts did. The authors suggest that higher levels of neuroticism may impair cognitive performance, 'thus moderating the effects of "actual" cognitive ability on tested intelligence – mainly because of their likelihood to elicit test anxiety and lack of confidence' (p. 149).

Williams (1971) administered a battery of personality and productivity tests to 150 anglophone students who had been divided into three groups according to their loquacity in the classroom: active participation, intermediate participation and nonparticipation. The group of nonparticipating students had the highest scores on neuroticism and the lowest scores on self-esteem and intellectual productivity. There is every reason to believe that this relation holds for the foreign language class. Dewaele (2002a) found a positive correlation between neuroticism and FLA in French and English among Flemish high school students.

Psychoticism

In Eysenck's three-factor model there is one further trait, namely psychoticism, whereas in the five-factor model, the remaining variance is described in terms of openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Eysenck argues that agreeableness and conscientiousness are primary level traits that both form facets of psychoticism (negatively related). Psychoticism was conceived to be related to behavioural disorders, but it is designed to measure individuals belonging to a normal population, rather than pathological cases.

A high scorer on the psychoticism scale is characterised by Eysenck and Eysenck (1976: 47) in their study of psychoticism as a dimension of personality as being 'cold, impersonal, hostile, lacking in sympathy, unfriendly, untrustful, odd, unemotional, unhelpful . . . lacking in insight, strange, with paranoid ideas that people were against him'.

Furnham and Medhurst (1995) found that individuals with low scores on the P scale were more likely to have good oral and written expression, were more motivated and participated more actively in seminars. Dewaele (2002a) also found that high-P Flemish learners of English L3 suffered less than low-P participants from FLA in English (but not in French) (cf. next section). One explanation put forward was that a higher level of hostility is linked to a more limited concern about the reaction of the interlocutor(s) to one's speech production in the foreign language, hence a lower level of FLA for the speaker.

Foreign language anxiety

FLA refers to a feeling of tension and apprehension linked to speech production and reception of an L2 (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). It has been defined as 'a stable personality trait, among experienced language learners' (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 297). The choice of the term 'trait' is significant as it suggests a stable disposition to becoming anxious when using a language in a particular situation. States on the other hand are more transient in nature and would only occur when certain contextual conditions were met. Dewaele (2002a) argued that the apparent stability of FLA could be related to the fact that most studies considered only individuals with a single foreign language.

Aida (1994) found a moderate negative correlation between FLA and course grades of 96 students of Japanese. Reviews of the literature on FLA conclude that a moderate negative relationship exists between FLA and various measures of language achievement (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999).

Dewaele (2002a) demonstrated that patterns of interindividual variation in levels of FLA were quite different in the French L2 and English L3 of Flemish students.[2] Social class was found to predict FLA in French but not in English. Global personality traits were not significantly linked to FLA in French but they did significantly predict levels of FLA in English L3 production. Extraverts, high-P and low-N participants reported lower levels of FLA in English. Rodriguez and Abreu (2003) examined the stability of the general foreign language classroom anxiety construct across foreign languages. Their participants were university students who were majoring simultaneously in English and French. They completed two Spanish versions (one for each language) of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The

FLA scores in both languages were non-significantly different (2003: 367). The authors conclude that the construct of FLA is stable across English and French (2003: 372). However, van Daele's (2007) longitudinal study on the effects of psychological variables on the SLA of English and French by 25 Flemish students (Dutch L1) showed differential effects of FLA on both foreign languages, and a lack of stability in its effects: FLA correlated negatively with lexical richness in English and French, and positively with grammatical accuracy in English at the start of the study. FLA was not significantly linked to lexical and grammatical accuracy in French, nor to syntactical complexity or fluency in both foreign languages. Interestingly, the effects were strongest for English, the language for which participants reported lower levels of FLA than French (i.e. confirming the finding of Dewaele, 2002a). The effects of FLA completely disappeared at the last data collection point after 22 months (Van Daele, 2007).

A study by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (to appear) on adult multi-linguals showed significant positive correlations between levels of communicative anxiety (CA)[3] across four languages including the L1. A significant negative correlation was found between levels of CA in the L1, L2, L3 and L4 and levels of trait emotional intelligence, which is a lower-level personality trait. The authors argue that self-confidence in one's ability to read the emotional state of an interlocutor lowers one's CA. Age of onset of acquisition and context of acquisition were linked to FLA: older starters and purely instructed language learners were found to suffer from higher levels of FLA. A higher frequency of use of the TL, a stronger socialisation in a language, a larger network of interlocutors and a higher level of self-perceived proficiency in a language were also linked to significantly lower levels of FLA. The authors conclude that FLA is linked to a myriad of interacting psychological, situational, cultural and social factors.

The cultural background of students also seems to determine levels of FLA: Woodrow (2006) reports that English language learners from Confucian Heritage Cultures (China, Korea and Japan) suffered more from FLA than other ethnic groups. She suggests that FLA can be due to a skills deficit or retrieval interference. FLA could thus be curtailed by extra instruction in the former case, whereas de-sensitisation and relaxation techniques could benefit anxious students in the latter case (Woodrow, 2006: 324).

Thus it seems clear that CA and FLA are linked to a myriad of interacting psychological, situational, cultural and social factors.

Gender

Some characteristics of gender may warrant closer investigation. It seems that on average, women are better at tasks involving fluency in language, which may give them an edge in SLA. Aida (1994) found that her 40 female American students of Japanese achieved higher grades than the 56 male students. The author attributes this gender difference to the use of different language learning strategies by men and women. The females might have used more language learning strategies, which would have positively affected their achievement levels in Japanese. A similar pattern emerged in a study by

Gu (2002), who considered individual differences among 648 second-year Chinese EFL students. The females outperformed males on a vocabulary levels test and a college English test.

Gender has also been found to be linked to language attitudes and motivation, with male learners scoring higher on instrumental motivation and female learners obtaining higher scores on integrative motivation (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Dewaele, 2005b). This could, in turn, affect the outcome of the learning process.

Social class

The social class of parents has been found to be an important predictor in children's attitudes towards learning and academic performance (Furnham & Heaven, 1998). Parents with a higher socioeconomic status have certain values and beliefs that increase the likelihood of academic success (Argyle, 1994). One may expect, by extrapolation, that language learning success may be linked to the socioeconomic status of the parents. Parents with higher socioeconomic status are probably also better able to afford private tuition or foreign language learning camps for their children during the holidays. The parents can also afford foreign holidays and language exchanges with children from the TL community.

Ability and language aptitude

Gardner (2006) talks about 'ability' (both intelligence and language aptitude) as one of the two primary individual difference variables involved in language learning (the other one being motivation). Gardner (2006: 241) predicts that learners with higher levels of ability will be more successful language learners. Dörnyei and Skehan (2003: 590) see language learning aptitude as a 'specific talent for learning ... languages which exhibits considerable variation between learners'. There is still uncertainty about the exact causes of individual differences in ability and language learning aptitude. Sparks and Ganschow (2001) suggest that this capacity to learn an L2 is related to an individual's L1 learning skills, and that the L2 learning difficulties could be linked in part to L1 difficulties. An individual's language aptitude would be linked to a single factor, namely 'linguistic coding', which refers to L1 literacy skills. These abilities would be fundamental for learning an L2, and an insufficient level of development in linguistic coding skills would limit the ultimate attainment in the L2.

However, in a recent paper, Dörnyei (2006) wondered whether such a thing as 'language aptitude' actually exists and whether it is just a number of cognitive factors making up a composite measure that can be referred to as the learner's overall capacity to master a foreign language.

Sternberg (2002) defends the view that success in SLA depends on 'successful intelligence', i.e. a combination of creative and practical abilities with memory and analytic abilities. Success depends on the match between instructional conditions and pattern of abilities. In other words, 'when students are taught in a way that fits how they think, they do better at school' (Sternberg, 2002: 34).

Hypotheses

Based on the findings and observations reported in the previous section, the following hypotheses will be tested:

(1)   Female participants will obtain higher grades than male participants for the different languages.
(2)   Participants from higher social classes will obtain higher grades.
(3)   Participants scoring low[4] on the extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism scales will obtain higher grades for the different languages.
(4)   Participants with higher levels of FLA will obtain lower grades in the L2 and L3.
(5)   Grades in the different languages will be linked.

Method

Participants

The participants included 89 students in their last year of secondary education at the Koninklijk Atheneum I in Bruges, Belgium. The sample consisted of 42 males and 47 females. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 21 ($M = 17.7$, $sd = 0.09$). All participants had Dutch as an L1. All the participants had had formal instruction in Dutch (4 h/week) since the onset of primary school, in French (between 2 and 4 h/week, starting at age 10) and in English (between 2 and 4 h/week, starting at age 12 or 14). Thirty participants were studying German (between 2 and 3 h/week, starting at age 16).

Materials

The materials included the abbreviated version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQr), which contains 12 items for each personality dimension: P, E, N and a lie scale (Eysenck *et al*., 1985). There has been increasing interest in this questionnaire as a research tool for psychologists (Forrest *et al*., 2000). Confirmatory factor analysis showed the unidimensionality of the four EPQr-A subscales of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and the lie scale[5] (Forrest *et al*., 2000).

It yielded the following results for our sample ($N = 89$): psychoticism (P): $M = 3.84$, $sd = 2.00$, Cronbach alpha $= 0.87$; extraversion (E): $M = 8.49$, $sd = 3.22$, Cronbach alpha $= 0.92$; neuroticism (N): $M = 6.16$, $sd = 3.35$, Cronbach alpha $= 0.91$. Participants were divided into three groups for each personality dimension: a 'low' group, with scores of more than one standard deviation

Table 1 Distribution of participants on psychological dimensions

Level	Psychoticism	Extraversion	Neuroticism	FLA French	FLA English
Low	23	21	23	15	37
Medium	58	51	57	60	47
High	8	17	9	14	5

below the mean, a medium group with scores within one standard deviation below or above the mean and a 'high' group with scores of more than one standard deviation above the mean (for the distribution, see Table 1).

FLA levels in French and English were measured with a so-called 'anxometer' for foreign language use, i.e. a three-point Likert response format (possible answers to the questions 'How anxious are you when using . . . '? (a) not anxious = 1, (b) a little anxious = 2, (c) anxious = 3). Levels of FLA were significantly lower for English ($M = 1.64$, $sd = 0.59$) than for French ($M = 1.99$, $sd = 0.57$) ($t = -4.54$, $df = 88$, $p < 0.0001$). This is obviously a very crude way to measure FLA, but it does provide us with a sufficient indication of FLA in the use of these two foreign languages[6] (for the distribution, see Table 1). A Pearson's correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between FLA levels in French and English ($r = 0.223$, $df = 88$, $p < 0.035$).

Participants also filled out a sociobiographical questionnaire. The participants' social class was determined through the highest level of education attained by one of the parents (Preston, 1989). Thirty-six participants (21 females) thus fell into the 'low' category (degree of secondary education or less), 38 participants (20 females) fell into the 'medium' category (degree of further education, maximum length being 3 years) and 15 participants (6 females) fell into the 'high' category (university degree, obtained after a minimum of 4 years of study).

Nine participants reported having done language summer camps in France (5 from the middle social category and 3 from the higher category). Five participants had done summer camps in the UK (4 from the middle social category and 1 from the higher category).

The dependent variable: End of year language grade

The language grades in the students' different language classes were determined according to the same strict criteria issued by the Ministry of Education (Leerplan Secundair Onderwijs 1997). The grade reflects a composite score obtained at the end of year examination for written (50%) and oral (50%) skills. Half of the score for written skills was based on a reading test (a previously unread text followed by questions on the content) and a written production task (a short essay). The score for oral skills is composed of a comprehension test (a previously unheard speech extract followed by questions on the content) and an oral production task (interview on material prepared by the student). Unfortunately, only the final grades were obtained, not the subscores which constituted the grade. Teachers calculated the final grades in the different languages (including the mother tongue) in identical ways and the grades were verified by the headteacher. The expected levels of performance obviously differed across languages (see Appendix). The scores for the different languages have thus been calculated in similar ways but they should be seen as relative indicators of proficiency. A grade of 80% in the L1 and the L4 both denote a high level of performance in relation to the expectations, which are much higher for the L1 than for the L4 (see Appendix). A higher grade in L4 than in L1 does not imply a higher level of proficiency in L4. Comparisons can therefore only be made within-group.

Table 2 Mean grades and standard deviations (SD) for the four languages studied by participants

Language	L1 (Dutch)	L2 (French)	L3 (English)	L4 (German)
Number of participants	89	89	89	30
Mean grade (%)	62.9	60.1	65.6	58.3
Standard deviation	9.7	10.0	12.8	12.1
Range	38–87	36–88	38–91	30–82

A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that the language grades were normally distributed for the four languages. As can be seen in Table 2, the mean is highest for English and lowest for German.

Research design

One-way univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used. When significant results emerged, the ANOVAs were supplemented by Scheffé post-hoc tests to pinpoint differences.

Pearson correlation analyses were used to investigate the relationship between language grades in the different languages.

Results

Gender and social class

The grades in the different language were submitted to a series of one-way ANOVAs with gender and social class as independent variables. The analysis reveals inconsistent effects across languages. Gender had a significant effect on grades in the L1 (the female participants scoring higher) but not in the foreign languages. Social class had a significant effect in the L2 (higher class being linked to higher grades) but not in the other languages. The ANOVAs also reveal a lack of interaction between gender and social class (see Table 3 for complete results).

Psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism

The 3×1 ANOVAs for psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism revealed no significant effects of these psychological variables on language grades. Only a marginal effect emerged in the L4, namely of neuroticism, with high-N participants tending to obtain lower grades (low-N: 55.7; medium-N: 61.9; high-N: 44.7). The adjusted R^2 values for the different languages suggest that these psychological dimensions explain no variance at all in L1 grades, around 5% for the L2 and L3, and around 30% in the L4. No interaction effects emerged between psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism (see Table 4).

Table 3 ANOVA: between-subjects effects for social class and gender on language grades

Language	*Variable*	**F**	**p**
L1	Social class	0.65	ns
	Gender	4.83	0.031
	Social class*gender	0.11	ns
L2	Social class	3.89	0.024
	Gender	2.53	ns
	Social class*gender	0.20	ns
L3	Social class	0.51	ns
	Gender	1.26	ns
	Social class*gender	0.17	ns
L4	Social class	0.89	ns
	Gender	0.11	ns
	Social class*gender	1.81	ns

Table 4 ANOVA: between-subjects effects for psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism on language grades ($df = 2, 88$ for L1, L2, L3 and $df = 2, 29$ for L4)

Language	*Adjusted* R^2		**F**	**p**
L1	0.00	Psychoticism	1.372	ns
		Extraversion	1.013	ns
		Neuroticism	0.232	ns
L2	-0.051	Psychoticism	1.852	ns
		Extraversion	1.367	ns
		Neuroticism	0.417	ns
L3	-0.068	Psychoticism	0.154	ns
		Extraversion	0.626	ns
		Neuroticism	0.538	ns
L4	0.30	Psychoticism	0.680	ns
		Extraversion	1.360	ns
		Neuroticism	3.542	0.052

Ns, non significant.

Foreign language anxiety

The one-way ANOVA with FLA as independent variable revealed a highly significant effect both in the L2 and the L3 (see Table 5). The adjusted R^2 shows that FLA accounts for 5% of variance in language grades in the L2 and for nearly 19% in the L3.

Table 5 ANOVA: between-subjects effects for FLA on language grades in L2 and L3 ($df = 2, 88$)

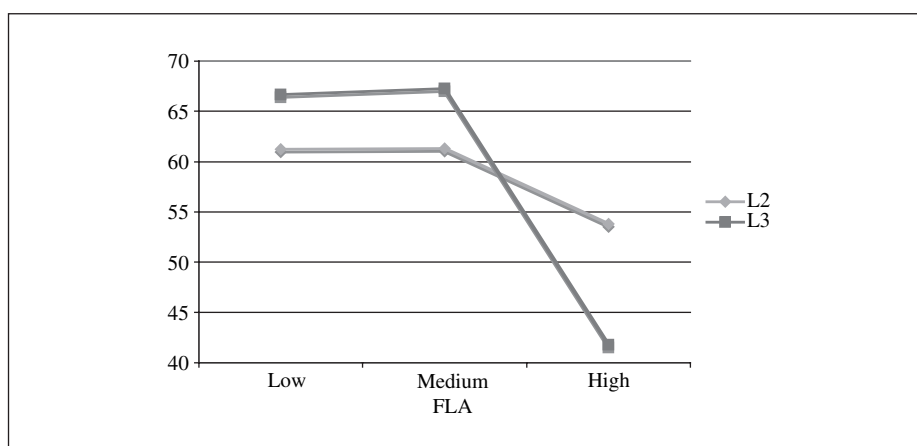| Language	Adjusted R^2	F	p	Eta squared	Scheffé post-hoc
L2	0.053	3.467	0.036	0.075	Medium/High: $p < 0.05$
L3	0.187	11.128	0.0001	0.206	Low/high: $p < 0.05$; medium/high: $p < 0.05$

Figure 1 The effect of foreign language anxiety on language grades

Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of the mean scores for the different groups according to level of FLA. The striking finding is that the mean scores of the low and medium FLA groups are almost similar. However, a Scheffé post-hoc test reveals that the high FLA group has significantly lower grades in both the L2 ($p < 0.040$) and the L3 ($p < 0.0001$).

The relationship between language grades

A series of Pearson correlation analyses show strong positive relationships between the language grades in the various languages, suggesting that individuals who obtained the highest grades in the L1 also obtained significantly higher grades in the L2 and the L3. However, the relationship is no longer significant between the grades for the L1 and for the L4 (see Table 6).

To sum up, the findings of the study offer only limited support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (females obtained significantly higher grades in the L1 but

Table 6 Correlations between language grades in the four languages

	L1 Dutch	*L2 French*	*L3 English*
L2 French ($n = 89$)	0.44***		
L3 English ($n = 89$)	0.38***	0.48***	
L4 German ($n = 30$)	0.30	0.38*	0.30

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.0001$.

not in the foreign languages, participants from higher social classes only obtained higher grades in the L2).

No support was found for Hypothesis 3 (psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism had no significant effect). Hypothesis 4 was confirmed (FLA was negatively linked to grades in the L2 and L3). Hypothesis 5 was equally confirmed (strong links exist between grades in L1, L2, L3 and weaker links with L4).

Discussion and Conclusion

The image that emerges from the analyses is both simple and complex. Gender and social class turned out to have inconsistent effects on language grades: female students outperformed their male peers in the L1 but no significant differences emerged in the foreign languages. Likewise, social class had an effect in the L2 but nowhere else. No interaction occurred between these two independent variables.

The significant positive correlations between language grades in the L1 and language grades in the L2 and L3 (but not significant for the L4) could be interpreted as evidence that participants with higher language grades for their mother tongue had in fact higher levels of language aptitude or verbal ability. This higher aptitude or ability washed over to the L2 and L3, resulting in higher grades, but did not quite have the same effect on language grades in the L4. Those participants with higher levels of language aptitude or successful intelligence (Sternberg, 2002) could have outperformed their peers with lower levels of aptitude in any language. Unfortunately no IQ test results were available for the participants, which would have allowed this hypothesis to be tested. Alternatively, one could argue that those participants with the highest grades for languages were the ones whose pattern of abilities that make up 'successful intelligence' matched the instructional conditions most closely. Another possibility would be that participants obtained higher grades not only when there was a match between their pattern of abilities and the type of teaching, but also the type of measurement of success. In other words, some might have excelled at doing oral and written tests on which the grades were based. This 'internalist' interpretation would be refuted by postmodernists who insist on the importance of social context (cf. Kinginger, 2004). It could thus be argued that the higher scores were not the consequence of some innate characteristics, but rather the result of the social context and the family atmosphere. In other words, participants who grew up in an environment where creativity with language and literacy was applauded, where children

were encouraged to read novels, write stories, play Scrabble and do drama classes, might have developed an ease with words that allowed them to shine in language classes. Their higher levels of verbal ability would therefore be the consequence of nurture rather than nature. The truth lies probably somewhere in the middle, hence the decision to label language aptitude or verbal ability as an (invisible) sociocognitive factor.

The effect of the three basic personality variables on language grades is very limited and inconsistent across the four languages. This finding confirms patterns discovered earlier in studies where test results for a single foreign language were linked with personality scores. It is important to point out that nothing is wrong with the independent variable, nor with the research instrument (EPQr) used to produce the personality scores. The EPQr is recognised as a highly reliable instrument (cf. Forrest *et al*., 2000). The lack of effect could be attributed either to the nature of the dependent variable or to the fact that the link between global personality traits and language learning outcomes are simply too tenuous. Dewaele and Furnham (1999) have pointed out that extraversion scores seldom correlate with test results but that strong relationships can emerge when the dependent variables are temporal measures of oral performance. Our language grades are composite measures reflecting both written and oral performance. One could object that they are not truly 'objective' variables of linguistic performance. Indeed, they reflect the teacher's judgement of students' oral and written language proficiency within the Flemish instructional context. Yet, these language grades constitute a didactic reality, and they are calculated according to strict criteria and formulae. It is therefore perfectly justified to investigate whether they are linked to personality variables. The lack of a relationship could be linked to the independence of global personality characteristics and language learning success such as it is measured in schools. Gregariousness and risk-taking may be useful in language learning, but so is dedicated study in isolation and linguistic risk-avoidance. Just as it seems impossible to draw the exact psychological profile of millionaires, it is impossible to predict who will become a successful foreign language user. In trying to do so, we might be peering through the wrong end of the microscope. Success in the language class, at school or in society is a process that takes many years, and a person's inner psychological make-up may have nothing (or only very little) to do with it. Anyone could become successful through immersion in the right environment sparking high levels of motivation, a love of challenges, a determination to succeed under the guidance of good teachers and a preparedness to make sacrifices to get the desired result.

The significant negative effect of the lower-order psychological variable, FLA, on the grades in the L2 and the L3, should be interpreted with great caution. A single question on levels of FLA in L2 and L3 use can at best give an approximative indication about this trait. The fact that a significant positive correlation was found between FLA in French and English suggests that it may indeed be a foreign language independent trait. However, the negative relationship that emerged between FLA and language grades should not be automatically interpreted as a cause–effect relationship. It is possible that

those who suffered more from FLA disliked the foreign language more. This dislike could be linked to the teaching method, the teacher's personality, the peers in the language class, the materials used in the class, a single episode of failure at a test, or an enduring dislike for the language after a communication breakdown when using the language. These elements could contribute to lower levels of motivation, less effort in study and avoidance of contact with the language. It is possible also that a negative event or attitude in one language class may affect the effort produced in other foreign language classes. Indeed, students may decide – prematurely – that 'they are not good in languages'.

In sum, the originality of the present study lies in the fact that the effect of independent variables was considered for participants' grades in up to four languages. The inconsistent effects of the independent variables confirm earlier research findings on the huge amount of individual differences in foreign language learning outcomes. It shows that the essential characteristics of the 'good language learner' (cf. Naiman *et al*., 1978) are not purely psychological in nature (if high grades for language classes can be accepted as indication of 'good learning'). I can only agree with Gardner and MacIntyre's observation (1992) that there are as many factors that might account for different outcomes in SLA as there are individuals. While some sociocognitive factors (language aptitude) may be involved, it is a hugely complex combination and dynamic interaction of multiple social, didactic and purely personal variables that will drive the language learner on the way to elusive 'success'. A factor that has little or no effect in one individual may have a huge effect in another. Chaos theory's famous metaphor of the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly influencing the weather a continent away (Gleick, 1987) probably applies to SLA too. A kaleidoscope of words and events in our lives shape and reshape our sense of self and our objectives in life, resulting in linguistic progress, stagnation or loss. No single dimension can predict success in SLA.

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Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Jean-Marc Dewaele, Department of Applied Linguistics, School of Languages, Linguistics and Culture, Birkbeck, University of London, 43 Gordon Square, WC1H 0PD London, UK (j.dewaele@bbk.ac.uk).

Notes
1. No information is provided on the participants' linguistic background.
2. The present corpus.
3. 'Communicative anxiety' is a more global term that includes FLA as well as anxiety in the use of the L1.
4. The choice of the direction is arbitrary as the literature shows that according to the type of task both extraverts and introverts could obtain higher scores.

5. The data of the lie scale were not included in the present analysis.
6. The analysis was not performed for the L1 and L4 because of insufficient variance in the data: most participants reported not feeling anxious in using the L1 and feeling anxious in using the L4.

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Appendix

(downloaded on 10 March 2007 from: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/english/corecurriculum/secondary/3grade/aso/dutch.htm)

Final objectives of the third grade of regular secondary education in Flanders, Belgium.

Dutch L1

I Listening

(1)   The pupils are able to listen to explanations and the statement of a problem by an adult they know at a structural level, related to part of the curriculum intended for their contemporaries and are able to write them down (cf. writing).

(2)   By using various media and multimedia information carriers, the pupils are able to critically listen to types of text intended for adults they know. This concerns types of texts intended for an unknown audience such as: entertainment texts such as talk shows; informative texts, reports of facts and experiences; persuasive texts, such as points of view and opinions in problem solving discussions; texts giving instructions, such as advertising messages.

(3)   The pupils are able to use different strategies to ascribe meaning to unknown words. This concerns the use of: the context; a prior knowledge of language and the world; the principles of the formation of words (derivation, composition, knowledge of foreign languages); the dictionary.

(4)   In planning, carrying out and reflecting on the listening tasks, pupils are able to: determine their listening aim(s); decide on the aim(s) of the text; make use of their prior knowledge; identify the subject and main idea(s); select and arrange information in a targeted way; ask for additional information; determine the relations between parts of the text in terms of content and function; determine the function of additional visual information that is provided (linking looking); assess the use of the language of the speaker; devote attention to the non-verbal behaviour of the discussion partner/speaker.

(5)   The pupils are able to choose a listening strategy depending on the listening aim(s) and the types of text which are used (orientational, searching, general or intensive).

(6)   The pupils are prepared to listen; adopt an unprejudiced listening attitude; allow another to speak; reflect on their own listening behaviour; test what they hear against their own knowledge and their understanding.

II Speaking/conducting conversations

(7)   At a structural level, pupils are able to ask an adult they know some questions and formulate answers with regard to parts of the curriculum in school subjects.

(8)   At a structural level and for an unknown audience, pupils are able to: give instructions; present well-documented information; have an interview for a job.

(9)   For an unknown audience, pupils are able to critically: ask for information, make requests, formulate complaints/objections (directly or on the telephone); explain and motivate views/opinions or solutions for problems in an exchange of ideas, discussion, meeting; express their feelings in an appropriate register and present their personal experiences; formulate messages intended to lead to action.

(10)   For the planning and execution of speaking tasks/conversation tasks and while reflecting on them, pupils are able to: determine their speaking and conversation aim(s); describe their audience; use their prior knowledge; depending on their speaking and conversation aim(s): select targeted information and formulate it in a clear way; ask for additional information; adapt their use of language; determine relationships between parts of texts in terms of content and function, and express these; make use of visual information; observe and formulate non-verbal behaviour. The are able to use conversation conventions to start, interrupt, continue and conclude conversations; recognise and put forward arguments; respond appropriately to the contribution of the discussion partner(s).

(11)   Within suitable communication situations, pupils are prepared to: speak; speak generally received Dutch; adopt a critical attitude to their own speaking and conversational behaviour.

III Reading

(12)   At a structural level, the pupils are able to read forms and administrative texts for an unknown audience;

(13)   The pupils are able to critically read texts for study purposes for unknown contemporaries.

(14)   The pupils are able to critically read the following texts for an unknown audience: Non-fictional texts: informative texts, including information sources such as diagrams and tables, hypertexts and explanations; persuasive texts: such as a column, a debate; texts intended to lead to action: such as publicity texts and advertisements, instructions. Fictional texts (cf. literature).

(15)   The pupils are able to use different strategies to ascribe meaning to unknown words. This concerns the use of: the context; a prior knowledge; the principles of the formation of words (derivation, composition, knowledge of foreign language); the dictionary.

(16)   In planning, carrying out and while reflecting on their tasks, pupils are able to: determine their reading aim(s);determine the aim(s) of the texts; determine the type of text; use their prior knowledge; recognise the function of the image and lay-out of the text; determine the relationships between parts of the text in terms of content and function; indicate the structure of a text; indicate and summarise the subject and main idea of the text to come to a better understanding of the text; briefly summarise the texts they have read; discern facts from opinions; assess the arguments in a text in terms of their value and relevance; select and use the information by making use of different information channels.

(17)   The pupils are able to choose and use a reading strategy depending on the reading aim and the types of text which are used (orientational, searching, general and intensive).

(18)   The pupils are prepared to: read; collect information about a particular subject by reading; compare the information they have obtained with their own knowledge and compare it with information from other sources; reflect on both content and structure of texts; formulate, question and, if needed, review their personal opinion on particular texts.

IV Writing

(19)   The pupils are able to write types of texts at a structural level intended for an unknown audience. This concerns types of texts such as: diagrams and summaries of information which they have listened to or read and study texts; instructions; invitations.

(20)   The pupils are able to write types of texts in a critical way intended for an unknown audience: reports; letters of application and CVs; business letters; well-documented and well-argued texts.

(21)   In the planning and execution of writing tasks and when reflecting on them, the pupils are able to: determine their writing aim(s);describe the intended audience; determine the type of text; use their prior knowledge; find, arrange and process information in a targeted way; create a logical text structure devoting attention to relations in terms of content and function; revise their own text; follow language conventions in terms of content and form; pay attention to the lay-out; quote correctly (acknowledgement of sources); make use of ICT.

(22)   The pupils are prepared to: write; provide written information; reflect on their own writing process and the content and form of their written product; take responsibility for language, structure, spelling, handwriting and lay-out.

V Literature

(23)   based on an experience of texts and the study of texts when they read, the pupils are able to: interpret, analyse and evaluate literary texts from the past and present. They can find connections: in the text itself; between texts; between the text and the broad socio-cultural field; between the text and the author; between the text and its multimedia design; describe their reading experiences in literary texts from the past and the present and compare these with other interpretations and value judgements of texts. The above-mentioned activities concern: poetry, prose; theatre show.
(24)   The pupils are able to describe, evaluate and document their choice of text and reading experience in a reading file.
(25)   The pupils can collect and use information on literature. To do this they know about the provisions of information channels such as: library, newspapers and magazines, radio and TV programmes, internet and cd-rom.
(26)   The pupils are able to make use of the appropriate reading strategies for these activities (cf. final objective 17).
(27)   For the execution of these activities, the pupils are able to make efficient use of data, concepts and methods.
(28)   The pupils are prepared to: read literary texts; speak and write about their own reading experience; put their reading experience in a social context; compare their own reading experience with the reading experience of others.

VI Language consideration

(29)   Pupils are able to recognise and name the following phenomena in their use of language and discuss their occurrence: language register, socially determined variants, regional variants, terminology; non-verbal elements; a number of text structures: evaluation structure, problem structure, measure structure and research structure.
(30)   The pupils are able to evaluate an argument in terms of its control and cohesion and identify false arguments.
(31)   The pupils are able to identify, name and discuss the interrelationship between important components (morphology, syntax, semantics) of the language system.
(32)   The pupils are able to recognise and discuss the influence of society, history and politics on the use of language and the language system.
(33)   The pupils are familiar with the different strategies to find the meaning of words they do not know. This involves making use of the context; prior knowledge of language and the world; the principles of forming words (derivation, composition, knowledge of foreign languages); the dictionary.
(34)   The pupils are familiar with the principles of our spelling system;
(35)   The pupils are able to monitor their own language tasks by means of recognising, naming and discussing linguistic characteristics;
(36)   The pupils are prepared to think about their own use of language and language system.

French-English

I Listening
The pupils are able to:

(1)   determine the general subject, identify the main idea, form a spontaneous view/evaluation, follow the train of thought in artistic literary texts such as a short story, a chanson/song, a play (excerpt), which are formulated in a way that is not too complex.

(2)   arrange the information in a comprehensible and personal way for: rather complex informative texts such as a report, a radio and TV news item, a documentary, an interview, a presentation; rather complex prescriptive texts such as an advertising message, an instruction; narrative texts such as a report, a film, a fragment of a serial, which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex; polemic texts such as a discussion, a debate and an argument, which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex; simply formulated and simply structured artistic literary texts such as a short story, a chanson/song, a play excerpt.

(3)   judge the information in: informative texts such as a report, a radio and TV news item, a documentary, an explanation, which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex; prescriptive texts such as an advertising message, an instruction, which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex; simply structured and simply formulated narrative texts such as a report, a film, a fragment of a serial; simply structured and simply formulated polemic texts such as a discussion, a debate, an argument.

(4)   sufficiently understand the discussion partner to participate in a rather complex conversation and in a telephone conversation which is not too complex.

(5)   The pupils are able to use the practical knowledge required to perform the listening task: with regard to form, meaning and the real context for the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to pronunciation, speech rhythms and patterns of intonation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the French-speaking/English-speaking world.

(6)   to apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their listening tasks, which promote the achievement of the listening objective using relevant prior knowledge related to content and expanding it at the same time; determining the listening objective; identifying the type of text; formulating hypotheses and listening expectations; relating the listening behaviour to the listening objective; not becoming distracted by the fact of not being able to understand everything in a stream of words; noting important information.

(7)   reflect on the individual character of the spoken language. This means that they: are familiar with the basic forms of interaction; are familiar with non-verbal behaviour; are familiar with the individual character of the spoken language (redundancy, incomplete sentences, abbreviated language forms); evaluate the speaker's use of language (formal, informal, confidential) and draw conclusions with regard to the intentions and emotions of the speaker.

(8)   use communication strategies. This means that they: make use of visual material, context, redundancy; can say that they do not understand something and ask what something means; ask someone to speak more slowly, repeat something, show something, spell something, say something in different words, write something down; repeat something themselves to confirm that they have understood the other person.

(9)   The pupils are prepared to: show an interest in what the speaker is saying; listen attentively and without prejudice; respect listening conventions; identify with the speaker's socio-cultural world; listen to French/English texts, also outside the classroom situation; be open to aesthetic experiences.

II Reading
The pupils are able to:

(10)   determine the general subject, identify the main idea, formulate a spontaneous view/ evaluation, follow the train of thought, select relevant information, recognise the structure and composition of the text in: rather complex polemic texts such as a pamphlet, an argument, a column, a reader's letter; artistic literary texts such as a poem, a short story, a novel excerpt, a play (excerpt), which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex.

(11)   arrange the information in a comprehensible and personal way for: rather complex narrative texts such as a (travel) story, a report; simply formulated and simply structured artistic literary texts such as a poem, a short story, a novel excerpt or a play excerpt; polemic texts such as a pamphlet, an argument, a column, a reader's letter, which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex.

(12)   judge the information in: rather complex informative texts such as a leaflet, a newspaper article, a review, a hyper text; rather complex prescriptive texts such as an advertising message; simply formulated and simply structured polemic texts such as a pamphlet, an argument, a column, a reader's letter.

(13)   The pupils are able to: use the practical knowledge required to perform the reading task as correctly as possible: with regard to form, meaning and the real context for the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to spelling and punctuation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the French/English-speaking world.

(14)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their reading tasks which promote the achievement of the reading objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content and expanding it at the same time; using practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; determining the reading objective; identifying the type of text; interpreting the lay-out (e.g. subtitles); relating the reading behaviour to the reading objective; not becoming distracted by the fact of not being able to understand all the words in a text; indicating important information; anticipating what is following, based on what has been read.

(15)   reflect on the individual character of the written language. This means that they: are able to make a distinction between different types of text; recognise different language registers (formal, informal, confidential use of language); indicate elements of the composition of a text; are able to interpret the writer's use of language and draw conclusions from it with regard to the writer's intentions and emotions.

(16)   use communication strategies. This means that they: deduce the meaning of words they do not know from the context; make efficient use of traditional and electronic sources and databases; use supporting visual materials (photographs, cartoons, tables and diagrams).

(17)   The pupils are prepared to: read without prejudice and concentrate on what they wish to find out; identify with the socio-cultural world of the writer; reflect on their own reading behaviour; read French/English texts, also outside the classroom situation; be open to aesthetic experiences; develop a personal preference and taste, by reading a broad and varied range of texts.

III Speaking/engaging in conversations
The pupils are able to:

(18)   provide and ask information about documents such as an illustration, a form, an instructions guide, a design, a quotation.

(19)   summarise the information in a comprehensible and personal way for: informative, prescriptive, narrative and polemic texts which they have listened to and which are formulated and structured in a way that is not too complex and informative, prescriptive, narrative and polemic texts which the have read and which are rather complex in formulation and structure; simple artistic and literary texts which they have listened to and texts which are not too complex and which they have read;

(20)   put forward a view or conclusion, stating reasons, about simple informative, prescriptive, narrative and polemical texts they have listened to or the same texts which they have read and which are not too complex;

(21)   report on, cover and comment on experiences and events;

(22)   give a simple presentation about a familiar subject;

(23)   start, continue and conclude a relatively complex, direct dialogue such as a conversation, question and answer session, discussion;

(24)   start, continue and conclude a telephone conversation which is not too complex;

(25)   put forward points of view, based on arguments in a discussion;

(26)   in a conversation, respond to the contributions of the partner in the conversation.

(27)   The pupils are able to use the practical knowledge which is necessary to perform the speaking task as correctly as possible: with regard to form, meaning and the real context of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to pronunciation, speech rhythms and patterns of intonation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the French-speaking/English-speaking world.

(28)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their speaking tasks/conversation tasks, which promote the achievement of the speaking objective: using the relevant prior knowledge related to content; using their practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; collecting information, also by using electronic resources, and incorporating the information; determining the speaking objective; drawing up a speaking plan; in a common speaking task, dividing the tasks, discussing these together, helping each other, keeping agreements, making use of each other's contributions and presenting the results together.

(29)   reflect on language and the use of language. This means that they: are familiar with the basic forms of interaction; are familiar with non-verbal behaviour; are familiar with the composition of a spoken text (redundancy, incomplete sentences . . .).

(30)   use communication strategies. This means that they: make use of receptive and productive skills simultaneously when carrying out their speaking tasks; make use of non-verbal behaviour; say it in a different way; say that they do not understand something, ask the other person to repeat something, indicate something, spell something; repeat something themselves to confirm that they have understood the other person; check with the conversation partner if the formulation is correct.

(31)   The pupils are willing to listen carefully in order to speak well; to speak and participate in a conversation; to aim for a correct use of words and grammar; to aim at a varied use of language.

IV Writing

The pupils are able to:

(32)   summarise, in a comprehensible and personal way, information found in simple texts listened to and in not too complex read tests. The texts are of the informative, narrative and polemic kind;

(33)   write a report about their own experiences, a situation or an event in a comprehensible and personal way;

(34)   write an informal or formal letter, memorandum or e-mail that is not too complex;

(35)   formulate a point of view about a familiar subject, stating reasons.

(36)   The pupils are able to use the practical knowledge required to correctly perform the writing task: with regard to form, meaning and the real context of the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to spelling and punctuation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the French-speaking/English-speaking world.

(37)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their writing tasks, which promote the achievement of the writing objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content; using their practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; collecting information, also by using electronic sources and incorporating the information; taking into account the target audience; drawing up a writing plan; using an appropriate lay-out; in a joint writing task, dividing the tasks, discussing them together, keeping to agreements, making use of each other's contributions and presenting the results together.

(38)   reflect on the individual character of the written language. This means that they: know that the written language is more formal and structured than the spoken language; understand the significance of spelling, punctuation and lay-out; are familiar with the composition of a written text.

(39)   use communication strategies. This means that they: independently consult traditional and electronic resources; make use of the possibilities of ICT in the writing process; make use of a model.

(40)   The pupils are prepared to: critically re-read the texts they have written to check form and content, and to learn from previous mistakes; devote attention to the presentation of their written texts; where necessary, look up the spelling of a word; aim for a correct use of words and grammar; aim for a varied language usage.

German

This collection of final objectives meets the situation in the decree which permits choosing German as the second modern foreign language instead of English, for the third degree of ASO, general secondary education.

I Listening

The pupils are able to:

(1)   determine the general subject, identify the main idea, formulate a spontaneous view/evaluation, follow the train of thought, select the relevant information and arrange the information in a comprehensible and personal way for: simply formulated and simply structured informative texts such as a radio and TV news item, an announcement, a weather forecast; simply formulated and simply structured prescriptive texts such as a public announcement, an instruction, an advertising message; simply formulated and simply structured narrative texts supported by visual material, such as a travel report (fragment), a fragment of a documentary, a film, a fragment of a serial; simply formulated and simply structured artistic literary texts such as a chanson/song, a play excerpt.

(2)   sufficiently understand the discussion partner to have a simple conversation or to participate in a simple telephone conversation.

(3)   The pupils are able to: use the practical knowledge required to perform the listening task: with regard to form, meaning and the real context of the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to pronunciation and speech rhythm; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the German-speaking world.

(4)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their listening tasks, which promote the achievement of the listening objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content; using practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; determining the listening objective; formulating hypotheses and listening expectations; relating the listening behaviour to the listening objective; not becoming distracted by the fact of not being able to understand everything in a stream of sounds; making notes.

(5)   reflect on the individual character of the spoken language; This means that they: are familiar with the basic forms of interaction; are familiar with non-verbal behaviour; evaluate the speaker's use of language in clear situations (formal, informal, confidential); are familiar with the individual character of the spoken language (redundancy, incomplete sentences, . . .);

(6)   use communication strategies. This means that they: make use of visual material, (lexical) context, redundancy; can say that they do not understand something and ask what something means; ask someone to speak more slowly, repeat something, show something, spell something, say something in different words, write something down; repeat something themselves to confirm that they have understood the other person.

(7)   The pupils are prepared to: show an interest in what the speaker is saying; listen attentively and without prejudice; respect listening conventions; identify with the speaker's socio-cultural world; be open to aesthetic experiences.

II Reading

(8)   The pupils are able to determine the general subject, identify the main idea, formulate a spontaneous view/evaluation, follow the train of thought, select the relevant information, identify the structure and composition of the text in: simply formulated and simply structured informative texts such as a diagram, a table, an announcement, a leaflet, a form, a questionnaire, a newspaper; article, an article in a magazine, a letter, an e-mail; simply formulated and simply structured prescriptive texts such as an instruction, a heading, a warning, an instruction guide, an advertising message; simply formulated and simply structured narrative texts, such as a report, a travel story; simply formulated and simply structured artistic literary texts, such as a cartoon, a short story, a youth novel excerpt, a poem, a play excerpt.

(9)   arrange the information in a comprehensible and personal way in simply formulated and simply structured informative texts, such as a newspaper article, an article in a magazine.
(10)   The pupils are able to use the practical knowledge required to perform the reading task: with regard to form, meaning and the real context of the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to spelling and punctuation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the German-speaking world.
(11)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their reading tasks, which promote the achievement of the reading objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content; using practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; determining the reading objective; identifying the type of text; formulating hypotheses, based on lay-out (e.g. subtitles, photographs, . . .); relating the reading behaviour to the reading objective; not becoming distracted by the fact of not being able to understand the text; making notes on the text, bearing in mind the aim of reading; anticipating what is following, based on what has been read.
(12)   reflect on the individual character of the reading task. This means that they: are able to make a distinction between different types of text; know about different language registers (formal, informal, confidential use of language).
(13)   use communication strategies. This means that they: deduce the meaning of words they do not know from the context; make use of visual material, (lexical) context, redundancy; make efficient use of traditional and electronic resources and databases.
(14)   The pupils are prepared to: read texts and concentrate on what they wish to find out; read thoroughly and without prejudice; identify with the socio-cultural world of the writer; read German texts outside the context of the classroom.

III Speaking/engaging in conversations
The pupils are able to:

(15)   provide information about themselves, their world and experiences, and ask for similar information;
(16)   give a spontaneous view/evaluation of a familiar subject.
(17)   describe a situation in a simple way;
(18)   report on their own experiences or an event.
(19)   recount an informative and narrative text which they have listened to or read;
(20)   react adequately to a simple direct conversation and a simple telephone conversation.
(21)   The pupils are able to: use the practical knowledge which is necessary to make use of the spoken language/conversation: with regard to form, meaning and the real context of the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to pronunciation and speech rhythm; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the German-speaking world.
(22)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their speaking tasks/ conversation tasks, which promote the achievement of the speaking objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content; using their practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; collecting information, also using electronic sources and incorporating the information; determining the speaking objective; in a common speaking task, dividing the tasks, discussing these together, helping each other, keeping agreements, making use of each other's contributions and presenting the results together.
(23)   reflect on language and the use of language. This means that they: are familiar with the basic forms of interaction; are familiar with non-verbal behaviour.
(24)   use communication strategies. This means that they: make use of non-verbal behaviour; formulate the message in a different way; say that they do not understand something, ask the other person to speak more slowly, ask to indicate something, spell something, say something in different words, write something down; repeat something themselves to confirm that they have understood the other person.
(25)   The pupils are willing to listen carefully as a condition for speaking well; speak and participate in a conversation; aim at a correct formulation and grammar.

IV Writing

The pupils are able to:

(26)   complete forms and questionnaires which are relevant to them;
(27)   in general terms, repeat the content of informative texts they have read;
(28)   formulate a spontaneous view/evaluation of a familiar subject;
(29)   write a simple announcement, letter and e-mail.
(30)   The pupils are able to: use the practical knowledge required to perform the writing task: with regard to form, meaning and the real context for the use of words and grammatical constructions; with regard to spelling and punctuation; with regard to the socio-cultural diversity in the German-speaking world.
(31)   apply learning strategies in planning, carrying out and evaluating their writing tasks, which promote the achievement of the writing objective: using relevant prior knowledge related to content; using practical knowledge and expanding it at the same time; taking account of the target audience; drawing up a writing plan; using an appropriate lay-out; in a joint writing task, dividing the tasks, discussing them together, keeping to agreements, making use of each other's contributions and presenting the results together.
(32)   reflect on the individual character of the written language. This means that they: know that the written language is more formal and structured than the spoken language; can interpret the significance of spelling, punctuation and lay-out.
(33)   use communication strategies. This means that they: consult traditional and electronic resources; make use of the possibilities of ICT or models in the writing process.
(34)   The pupils are prepared to: critically reread the texts they have written to check form and content; learn from mistakes; devote attention to the presentation of their written texts; where necessary, look up the spelling of a word.